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"Why might sociologists think social inclusion is important?"

My message in a bottle

You're probably reading this fifty years from when I wrote it. It's quite strange to think that you are writing something which won't be read by anyone until you're old, married, have a family and all of the other things which will take up precious space in your mind over some message in a bottle. I probably won't even remember writing it by then, so I'll just pretend that I know what society will be like fifty years from now and tell you what it's like today.

First of all, I'd like to point out that despite all the unfairness and inequality in society and the mighty efforts to try to overcome these, equality for all will probably never happen. Just look at communism. That's never really worked out too well. As the pigs said in George Orwell's Animal Farm, "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others". But then I don't know, maybe in fifty years' time you're reading this in a communist Britain, Australia or any other country in the world and it really works, although I doubt it.

Some people really struggle in society which is why sociologists of my time believe that this thing called social inclusion is important. Now I don't know how much sociology you know and I don't want you to waste any time trying to find the meaning of social inclusion on a fancy, high tech dictionary which is probably as light as air and transparent or something, so I'll just tell you. Social inclusion is where all individuals and groups of people in society have the right to certain aspects of society such as employment, healthcare and education.

Social inclusion is important to sociologists as people can be categorised as 'outsiders' or are marginalised and this can make individuals more aware of the social injustices which they may face for being different or seen as inferior, for example women being seen as 'lower' than men, and this is seen as extremely unfair by sociologists. Sociologists would probably argue that it is everyone's right to feel valued in society and rather than be discriminated against for their difference, they should instead be celebrated. Post modernists especially support this view as they argue that in a contemporary pick and mix society everyone should be free to have choice and individualism to act, dress or believe in whatever they want to. Functionalists would also argue that social inclusion is important as it highlights the links made by individuals in society and the role in which they play in society. Therefore since everyone has a specific and important role in maintaining the functioning of society, everyone should be treated fairly by others.

In 2014, (which is when I'm writing from by the way!) there is a lot of social exclusion instead of social inclusion. This is where some people are systematically blocked from these rights and opportunities. An example of a group who are socially excluded are disabled or mentally ill people as they are often marginalised in society.

I'm not sure what the situation will be like in fifty years' time or what the health service will be like by then. Maybe you will have a cure for disability or mental illnesses by using stem cells to replace dead cells or you will have a special machine that detects illness and just cures you as if by magic. In which case, well done. You are very lucky as these people do not have to go through their lives being discriminated against because of something which they neither chose nor can control.

In October 2014, there was a politician called Lord Freud who claimed that the disabled were 'not worth' minimum wage if they were employed, which means that he thinks that because they are disabled they should not be paid the same as someone who is able. He claimed that they should be paid £2 rather than the full £6.50, which is the rate of minimum wage. After making the comment

Lord Freud did apologise however his comment was still offensive to many people in the UK. This is an example of how disabled people are being disadvantaged in society as they are being deprived of the right to equal pay in employment. This level of unfairness is why social inclusion and equality is important to sociologists today as many of them want to overcome this unfairness.

Even though it was before my time, Erving *Gottman's* study into asylums and mental institutes (1961) is another good example of how the mentally ill are treated unfairly by society. I could argue that the healthcare system is supportive for this group of people as there is a special place for these people to go where they will be looked after all day, every day. This would be *seen* as an example of social inclusion as they are being given the right to good healthcare. However, Goffman found that these so called 'havens of rest' for the disabled are not always as you might think. These people had to undergo series of humiliating and degrading acts such as having to beg nurses for a lighter for a cigarette and then being ignored by the hospital staff. Some of these things may seem slightly trivial to you or you may be thinking that it's not too bad. But if you were in a place which completely stripped every aspect of your identity by making you have the same haircut and clothes as everyone else and made you beg for simple, necessities which everyone should be entitled to, even for something like a glass of water, I should imagine you would find it unfair. And don't get me wrong, Goffman went to some institutes which had much worse methods of humiliation to inflict on their patients. However I won't go too far into explaining those in case you are a small child (or a very sensitive adult). After all, this isn't supposed to scar you for life. I just wanted to make you think about what life was like for some people 'back in the day'.

Goffman's study shows that he cared about exposing the social injustices inflicted upon this group and he probably conducted his study in an attempt to influence more social inclusion for this group so that they would no longer be left out, deprived or mistreated.

By the time this message reaches you there may have been more sociological studies into disability, however by 2014 there have not been many. In fact Gottman's study is one of the few which looks into the lives of mentally ill people. Sociologists appear to have ignored this group in society when it comes to conducting studies and this makes you question whether they really do think that social inclusion is important for all in society. Surely if they really thought that it was an important issue they would have conducted more studies and done more to try to improve disabled people's social situation. This is where there is a downside to sociology as a subject as there tends to be a lot of focus on issues such as ethnicity and gender inequality, yet it misses out some other issues all together.

Perhaps these sociologists need to get their act together. They spend all of their time trying to fix the same old issues and yet they have barely scraped the surface on disability. There needs to be more sociologists who are willing to study disability and mental illness in society. People need to understand it more and try to improve people's lives rather than just ignore them as a whole.

But who knows? Maybe there will be an influx of studies into disability over the next ten years and I am just getting ahead of myself.

I have spoken quite a bit about disabled people being disadvantaged socially but you must understand they are not the only group. I know that I have slated the fact that gender, ethnicity and class are widely studied whereas disability is not, however it would be wrong for sociologists to start to dismiss these areas completely to focus solely on disability. What I'm saying is that things should be more equally spread out between these areas of inequality in society.

Radical feminists argue that women are treated unfairly by society as they are still paid less than men for doing the same job. Marxists argue that the working class are exploited by the elite in a capitalist society and are treated as criminals and untrustworthy so that they cannot overthrow the capitalist system and this disadvantages them. Ethnic minorities are another group who are labelled as criminal or 'bad' for society just because of an aspect of their identity which they have no control over, such as their skin colour or country of origin. All of these groups suffer from social exclusion and even though there are many movements such as feminism and Marxism which aim to improve social inclusion for the groups there is still a long way to go. So maybe in your society they have achieved it and there is finally equality between men and women and the police and government no longer label people as criminal based on their identity, everyone has access to good healthcare and are treated fairly by everyone else in society.

There are not as many movement groups who are fighting for rights for the disabled or mentally ill. And you probably never learnt about their disadvantages in your history lessons. Maybe you did learn about feminist movements and how women became equal and how racism was no longer a problem as skin colour doesn't matter just like it didn't when you were at primary school. (You were friends with people because of their personality not because they were white or middle classed or a boy). That's why I'm telling you about the disabled. I thought you should know that social inclusion is important, and not just for the obvious groups but for everyone.

I could have it wrong. Maybe I'm being too optimistic about the future. Maybe social exclusion is worse because nobody in society has access to any jobs as all of the jobs have been taken by robots, and there is no access to an education because no one needs to get a job so everyone just spends their days watching daytime TV whilst flying around in their hover cars and spaceships.

But what do you think? Is social inclusion still important in your society? Does it even exist? I guess I won't know whether it happens in the distant future, but at least now you know what it was like in the past.

I'm going to send this now. Just like in the olden days. I will put it in a bottle and send it out to sea and hope that it reaches someone eventually. Hopefully it won't get eaten by a whale or taken and destroyed by the so called 'elite'. Who knows where it will end up?

I hope that a few people get to read my message. Maybe when you have finished with it you should send it out again so that someone else can find it and read it. Kind of like a circle of life. Maybe you should just keep sending it out until the writing fades and the bottle leaks. I hope that enough people will have read it by that point. I would hate for anyone to be left out.

So good luck to you, my friend in the future. I hope you never have to suffer any social exclusion.

Yours sincerely,

The friend from the past

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